

VZCZCXR07529
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHIL #3677/01 3290127

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 240127Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0316
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 9444
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 9141
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 4069
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0666
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 6398
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 5251
RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHWSMRC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 003677

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PK

SUBJECT: REACTION TO ALLEGED DRONE ATTACKS IN BANNU

REF: ISLAMABAD 3654

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: According to local press, the alleged U.S. strike in Bannu on November 19 marked the first such attack in the settled areas of the Northwest Frontier Province, outside of the tribal areas. The strike drew a new round of condemnation by Prime Minister Gilani, coalition political parties, opposition leaders, and the media. According to Pakistani press, the strike killed four people, including a senior Al-Qaida member, and injured five others. The first strike within "Pakistan proper" is seen as a watershed event, and the media is suggesting this could herald the spread of attacks to Peshawar or Islamabad. Even politicians who have no love lost for a dead terrorist are concerned by strikes within what is considered mainland Pakistan. As the gap between private GOP acquiescence for U.S. action and public condemnation grows, Pakistani leaders who feel they look increasingly weak to their constituents could begin considering stronger action against the U.S., although we have yet to see any indication that such a decision is on the table. End Summary.

GOP RESPONSE

¶2. (C) President Zardari did not issue a public response. However, speaking to the National Assembly on November 20, Prime Minister Gilani condemned the alleged strikes as "intolerable" and said he hoped the incursions would stop with the change of administration in Washington. He refuted the accusation that the GOP had a secret agreement with the United States (as has been reported by the Washington Post). He repeated that the issue of drone strikes was being taken up with the U.S. government at various levels. (Note: Ambassador was convoked by the MFA on November 20, see reftel.) Gilani has also called into action a special joint parliamentary committee to follow up on the October 22 joint resolution against extremism.

PARLIAMENT PROTESTS

¶3. (C) On November 20 in the National Assembly, Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) Opposition Leader Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan criticized the GOP's inability to stop alleged U.S. incursion and asked that the matter be taken to the United Nations. PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal cited the Bannu attack as evidence that the GOP must have a secret agreement with the

U.S. Other parliamentarians claimed that they have seen drones hovering over Swat, and warned that future attacks could spread to Peshawar and Islamabad.

¶ 14. (C) Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman also made an impassioned speech during the Assembly session against alleged U.S. action in Bannu calling it "U.S. aggression and violation of Pakistan's territorial integrity." Rehman's party will hold a secret meeting to discuss their future actions in response to the continued drone strikes, according to contacts within the party. The Bannu attack is particularly significant for Fazlur because he represents the Bannu district.

¶ 15. (C) Even vehemently secular Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) Deputy Parliamentary Leader Haider Rizvi shared with Polcouns that, although MQM supports the killing of terrorists, his party can not withstand the popular sentiment against continued U.S. attacks. He described the growing popular and political pressure on the government that, in his view, will translate to pressure on the USG mission. Rizvi stressed that the people of Pakistan had not made their peace with drone attacks in the tribal areas, and a shift into mainland Pakistan was even more inflammatory. Rizvi, who is a member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee following the issue, said it planned to convoke PM Gilani, Chief of Army Staff General Kayani and perhaps former President Musharraf to explain GOP policy toward these attacks.

¶ 16. (SBU) Chairman of the Joint Committee Raza Rabbani told the press November 21 that Pakistan had the option of taking

ISLAMABAD 00003677 002 OF 002

the strikes to the UN, but he questioned whether the UN would be effective in stopping them. "Friendly countries are being asked to help Pakistan in convincing the U.S. to respect Pakistan's sovereignty," he said. All papers noted that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon had expressed "concern" about the U.S. attacks but noted that this was a bilateral issue between the U.S. and Pakistan.

NWFP RESPONSE

¶ 17. (C) Awami National Party leaders Asfandyar Wali Khan and Afrasiyab Khattak both condemned the strikes, saying such attacks could further weaken the harmony among the people of Pakistan and the U.S. Former NWFP Chief Minister and Bannu's provincial assembly representative Akram Khan Durrani appeared on several Pakistani TV news channels condemning the strikes. He also told fellow politicians that though he is a well-wisher of the U.S., attacks within the settled areas were going to push moderate political and religious forces "up against the wall." As the attacks spread into settled districts, he warned that politicians are losing face among their constituents and many "more people are willing to pick up arms rather than listen to us."

¶ 18. (C) There also were several student protests in Peshawar November 21 against the strikes. Anecdotal sources in Bannu report that though local people do not care about the death of Arabs or other foreigners, they are largely business-minded and do not want further instability. Bannu residents are worried about the panic created by drones hovering overhead. The city was further shocked by several militant rocket attacks on November 20, which were in response to the drone strikes.

¶ 19. (C) Comment: Pakistani politicians of all stripes, including those from the most ardently anti-terrorist parties, are facing growing political pressure to condemn U.S. attacks. As the gap between private GOP acquiescence and public condemnation for U.S. action grows, Pakistani leaders who feel they look increasingly weak to their constituents could begin considering stronger action against the U.S., even though the response to date has focused

largely on ritual denunciation.
PATTERSON